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Ready To Serve

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ISU students are enlisting as soldiers to defend our nation's freedom.

story by Jacqui Becker

After Sept. 11, one student realized his shock and disbelief could only be cured by one thing — joining his fellow Americans to defend the United States.

"In order for me to feel good about myself, I decided I needed to be part of the military, whether through intelligence or as a ground troop," says Nate Olson, junior in agricultural business.

Although he sees more benefits for his future in qualifying for the intelligence departments or achieving higher ranks, he's prepared for the

front lines. "That's where I'll serve if I need to," he says. Being on the front lines is not what his parents have in mind. They urged him to consider the consequences of enlisting before jumping into anything. "My parents are a little unsure of my thoughts on joining the military, but they are going to support me no matter what. They'd feel more comfortable with me being in another division of the military in which I wouldn't serve as a ground troop."

Since the terrorist attacks, Olson has gained a greater respect for the flag, war veterans and

people who enlisted before the attacks. "They wanted to do it without having a wake-up call tell them to," he says.

The terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington, D.C. and the subsequent military campaign are reminding us that there are hundreds of ISU students who have pledged their loyalty to our country in a way and a manner that is difficult for most of us to understand. Olson is a new recruit. Others made that pledge years ago. This is a look at some of their stories.

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Sgt. Andrew Krueger, sophomore in construction engineering, has spent 11 years in the Marines and the Army and is now in the Iowa Army National Guard. Krueger still is in contact with fellow reserve troops he was once stationed with — many waiting to be notified of their next duty. He hopes his troop will be one of the first units to be called, though the chance is slim. Krueger is in the 134th Infantry and is part of the only airborne unit in his National Guard division. "If we ever get called up, it would be to replace the active duty units," he says.

Mike Hall, freshman in pre-business, is an ammo troop for the Iowa National Air Guard. Trained in ammunitions, his job deals mostly with taking care of bombs and missiles. Like many ISU students, Hall joined the Air Guard mainly for college money, but he says he's ready to fulfill his duty if need be.

Scott Russell, freshman in liberal arts and sciences, signed up for the Iowa Army National Guard after his junior year in high school. He knew there was a possibility he could be called to war, but he didn't hesitate to enlist. "I knew back then that I'd be willing to go," he says.

Jason McReynolds, sophomore in aerospace engineering, is also in the Iowa Army National Guard. He joined more than three years ago because he knew it would be a valuable experience and a way to earn college money. "The thought always crosses your mind that something would happen and I would be called, but at the time, it wasn't a big worry," he says.

That changed quickly.

"When you start seeing the Army National Guard units being called, it makes me wonder," McReynolds says. He says it is hard for him to imagine being called to active duty.

"I'd like to say I wouldn't be scared. But there's no joking around, if we got

called, that's the real deal. It's a lot to think about. I'm not wishing for the opportunity, but I wouldn't shy away from it either. I joined knowing that I could be called to duty. I'm not going to fret about it or worry about it a lot. It's what I'm here to do, if needed."

Valerie Hobson, freshman in liberal arts and sciences, joined the Air Force ROTC the day before the attacks. Looking back, she acknowledges the timing was strangely coincidental. "I have a curiosity for the military. It's nice to be able to see whether you like it or not. Although I'm not sure if it's for me or not yet, I'm going to stick with it for a while," she says.

Ryan Ambrose, senior in management information systems, says his family has been in the military since the Revolutionary War. The Minnesota native says the Sept. 11 attacks have given him a sense of duty and honor along with giving him a reassurance of his military purpose. He relishes the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of his ancestors.

Paul Buck, sophomore in agronomy, has been in the long-range surveillance detachment airborne unit of the Iowa Army National Guard for five years. He hadn't planned on going to college, but he saw the guard as "more of a paycheck for my country." He's got one year of service left, and, like the others, he's ready to serve. "I've got a commitment to fill for another year. There's no ifs, ands or buts about it, I'll be where they need me," Buck says.

Matt Klein, an Iowa National Air Guard airman, says he is not thrilled about the chance of his college education being interrupted. Klein, sophomore in computer engineering, says thoughts of the Guard have been tough to get out of his head lately. "I've got a bag packed, because if they do call you only have a day's notice," he says.

He has also told his professors of the

situation and has discussed possible scenarios with his family. Klein never figured there would be another war in his lifetime, but the threat to national security makes him feel like more of an American. "It's given me a sense of where I live and who I am," he says.

The question is, how many of these students will actually see action? Charles Dobbs, professor of world and American military history, says the reserve units for the Army, Marines, Air Force and Navy will be and, in many cases have been, called up. Whether reservists at ISU will see action will depend on what unit they belong to and how useful that unit can be to the unprecedented counterattack against terror.

It is highly unlikely that any Guardsmen will be called for active duty on the front lines. The National Guard is a state organization, and during times of peace the senior officer is the governor. Plus, President George W. Bush has already urged state governors to use their guards to help protect airports. Walking around Des Moines International with an M-16, though time consuming and life disrupting, is pretty far removed from battle.

Most of these students would be glad to take the risks to defeat terrorism, to restore freedom from fear to America. However, many of Nate Olson's friends aren't ready to step in the line of fire. And he thinks that's wrong.

"There are men and women who have wives and children of their own that are leaving to defend our country. We are at the age where we can defend our country and we don't have a family of our own yet. People our age should step up to the challenge." Luckily, some have.

Jacqui Becker is a junior in journalism and mass communication and a senior editor for Ethos.